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NOAA's NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE DESIGNATES
LAKE COUNTY A STORMREADY COUNTY

(01-06-03) – The next time severe weather threatens, Lake County, SD will be ready for the storm.

Officials from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Weather Service (NWS) announced that Lake County in South Dakota has been declared to be one of the federal agency's StormReady counties.

"StormReady encourages counties to take a new, proactive approach to improving local hazardous weather operations and public awareness," said Greg Harmon, Meteorologist-in-charge of NWS - Sioux Falls. The nationwide preparedness program uses a grassroots approach to help counties develop plans to handle local severe weather and flooding threats.

The program is voluntary, and provides counties with clear-cut advice from a partnership with the local Weather Service Office, state and local emergency managers, and the media. StormReady was started in Tulsa, Okla., as a local effort to educate residents about storm safety. Harmon said the Weather Service's goal is to make at least 20 counties StormReady each of the next five years.

Todd Heitkamp, warning coordination meteorologist at the Sioux Falls, SD, Weather Service office will present a StormReady recognition letter and special StormReady signs to Donald Thomson, county emergency management director. The signs will be displayed prominently in the county.

"Every year, around 500 Americans lose their lives to severe weather and floods," Todd Heitkamp said. "More than 10,000 thunderstorms, 2,500 floods, 1,000 tornadoes, and 10 hurricanes impact the United States annually. Potentially deadly weather can impact every person in the country. That's why the National Weather Service developed the StormReady program.

(more)

To be certified as StormReady, a county must:

- establish a 24-hour warning point and emergency operations center;
- have more than one way to receive severe weather forecasts and warnings and to alert the public;
- create a system that monitors local weather conditions;
- promote the importance of public readiness through community seminars;
- develop a formal hazardous weather plan, which includes training severe weather spotters and holding emergency exercises.

“The United States is the most severe weather prone region of the world,” Heitkamp said, “The mission of the National Weather Service is to reduce the loss of life and property from these storms, and StormReady will help us create better prepared counties throughout the country.

“Just like counties, families need to be storm ready by having an action plan for severe weather. Through StormReady, the National Weather Service plans to educate every American about what to do when severe weather strikes because it is ultimately each individual’s responsibility to protect himself or herself. Only you can save your own life. The best warnings in the world won’t save you if you don’t take action when severe weather threatens,” said Heitkamp.

NOAA’s National Weather Service is the primary source of weather data, forecasts and warnings for the United States and its territories. National Weather Service operates the most advanced weather and flood warning and forecast system in the world, helping to protect lives and property and enhance the national economy. To learn more about the National Weather Service, please visit <http://www.nws.noaa.gov>. Also on the web: <http://www.stormready.noaa.gov/>

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